

Budget cuts put study on hold

Budget cuts sliced funding for the next phase of a three-part report anticipating and preparing for the state's water needs by midcentury. In July, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning released the first-phase report projecting water usage for 11 northeastern Illinois counties in 2050. In a worst-case scenario, the area would use 2.4 billion gallons of water a day, an increase of 64 percent from current levels. That, the report concludes, could trigger shortages for the region.

"Our money is part of what has been line-item vetoed," says Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of CMAP.

Sen. Susan Garrett, a Lake Forest Democrat, says she has been working with environmental and water groups for the past four years to get this legislation approved and is "very disappointed" it was pulled from the budget.

"The funding was promised to them," says Garrett. "It's a phased program. It's a very important program for the entire state of Illinois."

In an executive order in 2006, Gov. Rod Blagojevich asked for a study of the state's water resources. CMAP is conducting the \$1.14 million study, which is funded through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Research for the first phase was conducted by Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

The money that was cut from the FY 2009 budget would fund the second phase of the plan, a detailed accounting of the state's water supply conducted by the Illinois State Water Survey. CMAP then would match the water demand scenarios of the first phase with data on actual and projected water supply, reporting the conclusions in the third phase of the project.

As of mid-August, a capital spending plan had not been approved. "At some point in time, these dollars are going to be restored," says Garrett, "at least in order for me to sign off on a capital bill. The governor made a commitment. We need to follow through."

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